



## FRANCES and VICTORIA

Beautiful names for beautiful yachts, but what is their history?

*by* Colin Jarman



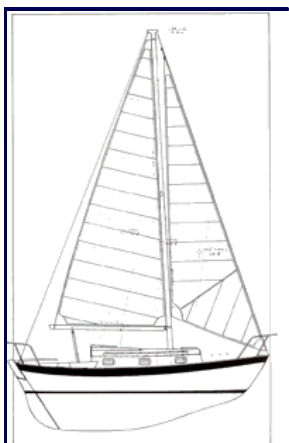
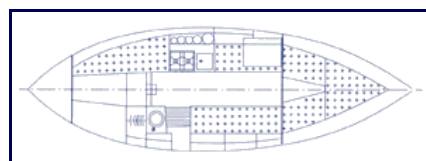
The parallel ranges of Chuck Paine designed, solid and serious cruising yachts began as a 26ft double ender that Chuck designed for himself. She had a long keel and virtually flush deck, providing the barest sitting headroom below. She was a really pretty, completely sound sea boat and deepwater cruiser.

Among others whose knowledgeable eye was caught by the pretty lines of the Frances was Bernard Hayman, the editor of 'Yachting World'. In the summer of 1980 he published a short piece in YW about Chuck's design, commenting that she was just the type of long keeled cruiser that had gone missing from the European market. His words and the lines published appealed to a number of the magazine's readers and Chuck began to receive enquiries from several of them in Britain. Many even visited Chuck in America and bought boats from Tom Morris who was building them in Southwest Harbor, Maine.

Bernard was so taken by the design that he later had one built for himself with a unique interior layout to his own design. He was a big man, well over 6ft tall, and welcomed the increase in cabin height that had been made by the time his boat was built. The consequent headroom below decks enabled him to sit comfortably upright.

In 1981 Chuck made an agreement with Peter Gregory to build the Frances 26 in the UK and gave Peter first option on all his other designs, both current and future. Peter bought a set of mouldings from Tom Morris and set up in business as Victoria Marine, named after his daughter.

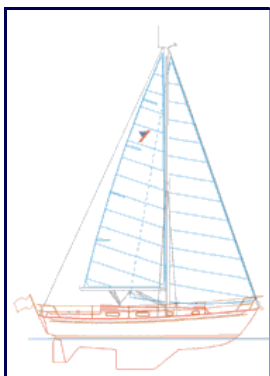
From the start there were several variations on offer for the Frances 26, both above and below decks. These juggled berths with galley, heads and chart table or changed between cutter and sloop rig, but interestingly, only two of the 26s were ever built as gaff cutters, although the rig suited them very well.



The Frances quickly gained a serious following and proved her seaworthiness on several Atlantic passages and other long voyages, such as to the Med and back. However, as is the way with things, there were enough people who liked the hull, but not the accommodation, for the Victoria 26 to come into being in 1985 with an identical hull, but an extended trunk cabin to give standing headroom throughout. She was again well received and was further refined at the beginning of the 1990s and renamed the Victoria 800 when the company went through a management change and became Victoria Yachts.

With the success of the Frances 26, it was natural to look at a larger version and Chuck produced drawings for the Victoria 30, known as the Morris Leigh 30 in America. Like her smaller sister she had a full keel, but was given a canoe stern. Below decks she had a simple layout with V-berths in the forecabin, a full width heads compartment, settee saloon berths, a galley to port aft and a quarter berth/chart table to starboard. Most Victoria 30s were masthead sloops, but a few were built as cutters.

In 1986 Chuck Paine designed the Victoria 34 exclusively for Victoria Marine. Looking very similar to his equally seaworthy Bowman 40, she had a fin and skeg underwater profile, rather than the full keel of her predecessors. She could be rigged as either a masthead sloop or a cutter with a short bowsprit and had berths below for five or six. There was a V-berth forecabin, forward heads, convertible U-shaped dinette, a quarter berth/chart table to starboard and a good-sized galley to port.



The Ministry of Defence was so taken by the Victoria 34 that they eventually put 15 of them into their sail training fleet (the Joint Services Adventurous Sail Training Association) and a further six were built for individual regiments (at the Kiel Yacht Club ) and sail training organisations. In these hands they were truly tested and came through with flying colours. They have calculated that these boats have survived 10 times more wear and tear than the average privately owned boat.

One owner of a Victoria 34 proposed the idea of having an inside steering position and commissioned Victoria Yachts to build him a one-off. The pilothouse Victoria was born and named the Frances 34. During her development, the extra weight of the pilothouse forced a redesign of the keel, which resulted in a move from the use of encapsulated lead ballast to an external, bulbed keel. This reduced the boat's draught by 7in and increased her stability by 25 per cent. So pleased was Victoria Yachts' Technical Director, Bob Hathaway, with the new design that he built the second Frances 34 for himself (to replace the 26 he had been cruising for nine years, including a trip to the Med and back) and incorporated further improvements to the keel, rig and engine, which then became the standard for future boats. They were generally built as inboard cutters with self-tacking staysails, while below decks they changed to a linear galley in place of the starboard saloon berth and the pilothouse with settee berth, quarter berth, internal steering position and chart table where the galley and quarter berth had previously been.



The last design to be produced was the Victoria 38, developed from the Morris 36/38. The first boat was sold from plans after the London Boat Show in 1996, but she did not actually go into production until 1997 when three orders had been confirmed. The Victoria 38 was a significant development of the Morris boat with considerable modifications made to the hull shape, a new keel, rudder and deck moulding. She was a more performance orientated design than her predecessors with a deep, bulbed keel and a powerful masthead sloop or cutter rig. Her extra length made a larger forecabin possible, together with separate aft cabin and aft heads compartment.



Sadly, in 1999, with a brand new Chuck Paine design in development – the Victoria 31 intended to replace the Victoria 30 – the builders succumbed to the pressures of trying to compete with mass production by European yards and closed, ending production of some of the finest cruising yachts of the last 20 or more years.

The story does not end there; it would be much too sad if it did. The tragedy is that the moulds for the Frances/Victoria 26/800 and the Victoria 30 have been destroyed, but the bright light of hope is that Tim Gearing, Managing Director of the new **Victoria and Frances Yachts Ltd** now owns the moulds for the Victoria 34 and 38 plus the Frances 34 and 38. He has also taken over **Harbour Marine Brokerage** (established in 1975 by Steve Constable), which specialises in the full Frances and Victoria ranges, so the legend lives on for anyone wanting one of these exceptional cruisers either new or used.

#### FOOTNOTE

The owners association for the Frances and Victoria designs was started in 1991 and is called the Victoria Shadow Association ([www.victoriashadow.co.uk](http://www.victoriashadow.co.uk)). The dual name is because it includes owners of the Shadow range of motor boats designed by Bill Dixon and launched by Victoria Marine.